

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I write to express my concern about the above bills. From my understanding these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity support for midwives providing care for women to give birth in hospital. While these changes are excellent if long overdue, it is not acceptable to effectively eliminate home birth as an option by not providing insurance for private midwives.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that many other western nations have supported home births for some time with positive results. These countries include The Netherlands (30% of women), New Zealand, the U.K and USA (37 states). In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose home birth amongst other birth options. In trying to improve Australia's maternity system to elevate it to the standards of other western countries, it is just unacceptable to not include home birth.

SAFETY OF HOME BIRTH

Outcomes of planned home births with certified professional midwives: large prospective study in North America.

BMJ 2005;330:1416 (18 June).

The study included prospectively reported data from more than 5000 women planning home births with Certified Professional Midwives in the year 2000 in the U.S. and Can, and found that outcomes for mothers and babies were the same as for low-risk mothers giving birth in hospitals, but with a fraction of the interventions.

Perinatal mortality and morbidity in a nationwide cohort of 529688 low-risk planned home and hospital births BJOG 2009.

De Jong et al found no differences in perinatal mortality between planned home and hospital births among 529,688 low risk women in a nationwide cohort study

Meta-analysis of the safety of home birth

Birth 1997 Mar;24(1):4-13; discussion 14-6

What is the relative safety of homebirth compared with hospital birth? Ole Olsen, a researcher from the University of Copenhagen, recently examined several studies of planned homebirth backed up by a modern hospital system compared with planned hospital birth. A total of nearly 25,000 births from five different countries were studied. The results: There was no difference in survival rates between the babies born at home and those born in the hospital. However, there were several significant differences between the two groups. Fewer medical interventions occurred in the homebirth group. Fewer home-born babies were born in poor condition. The homebirth mothers were less likely to have suffered lacerations during birth. They were less likely to have had their labors induced or augmented by medications or to have had cesarean sections, forceps or vacuum extractor deliveries. As for maternal deaths, there were none in either group. The combination of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent private midwives from registering and therefore take away a women's right to birth at home. I support a legislation that includes homebirth and where all consumers and health professionals are treated equally with the same access to funding and insurance protection. I believe the government currently subsidizes private indemnity insurance for GP's and Obstetricians and I wonder how is it equal to not offer this same support to private midwives?

It is implied that homebirths don't matter as women that choose them are a minority, yet similarly women who choose an elective caesarean are also a minority but are supported by the health system. It is also a common misconception that if the hospital maternity system is "fixed up" then women won't want or need to birth at home. Again, a false belief, many women choose to birth at home just because this is where they feel the most relaxed and calm and therefore the birth progress well.

My personal experience with homebirth has been nothing but positive. I chose a homebirth for two main reasons. Waterbirth was something I had read a lot about it seemed like a clean way to give birth and many studies I read showed the benefits for water in terms of pain relief and preventing perineal tears. It was also well proven in research that waterbirth was safe. This option was not available to me from any of my local hospitals public or private (Ballarat Health Services refuses to allow women to birth in water regardless of the research). The other reason I wanted to birth at home was to be an environment that I found calming and where I could have choice and be respected for the desire to have a natural vaginal birth. Hospitals do not respect a women's right to birth how she wants at this stage. The local hospital that I booked into for back up were not interested in the birth plan I made up at all. I had wonderful quality of care throughout my pregnancy with very regular ante-natal appointments in my own home. The two midwives were very thorough in terms of medical tests etc and also gave me a lot of information to read through regarding birth. They encouraged me to get a back-up obstetrician as well as booking into the local hospital, safety was definitely on there mind. The birth was a wonderful experience for me, and I would not birth any other way now. Because it was my own house I could have dim lighting, candles, soft music, wood fire going and my husband always by my side. After the birth the midwives stayed with me for quite sometime and helped to shower me, clean up, debrief over the birth experience, do all the relevant medical tests on baby and then they gave me help with breastfeeding. Every day for one week they visited and checked on breastfeeding, baby's progress and how I was coping. A 6 week check is also available for those that feel they needed, and I was encouraged to call my midwife anytime after that if I had any questions. To me home birth with a private midwife is the epitome of pregnancy and birth care - to be supported by the same midwives all the way through and to have them care for you so thoroughly. I don't believe I would have been this well looked after in hospital. I am currently pregnant again and also planning a home birth (as long as the pregnancy continues to be low-risk), this time I am to have two doulas for support as well as two midwives and a back-up obstetrician. We would love to have more children in the future but home births have become the only way that I feel comfortable too birth, so as scary and risky as it sounds I am seriously contemplating a free-birth next time if home birth is illegal by then. I believe this is the case for many women who have had home births. Particularly for those who have had very traumatic first births in hospital and amazing subsequent home births and therefore know the difference between the two options. Once you find a good thing, you stick with it - unless that choice is taken away from you.

In summary I would like to emphasize that home birth is not for everybody, and I am not trying to advocate it as a birth option that every women **should** choose. I understand that some women feel more relaxed and safer birthing in hospitals or birth

centres with or without interventions or pain relief and I respect this. I am merely protecting my right to choose where I birth and I trust you'll do the same for all women. Our body, our birth, our choice.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY EDMUNDS